

Chapter 1

Digital and Inter-Generational Divide

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ABSTRACT

Digital divide can be considered a macro economical index representing the social differences and the separation between the North and the South of the world. Since the first definition of digital divide, it has been shown that it is also a great and unrecognized problem in the developed countries, especially in the field of education. “Digital disconnection” is a key problem for School and University as institutions. In this paper, the above questions are widely analyzed with a special attention on the spreading gap between digital natives (i.e., young students), and digital immigrants (i.e., parents, teachers and policymakers in the school).

THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

We are aware that the more developed forms of capitalism are moving towards a new form of social configuration, the “information society” or the “access society” (Castells, 1996, 1997, 2000; Rifkin, 1995, 2000). This change is based on digital communication as “key technology” of the new millennium. G8 countries in the past

twenty years have had continuous economic and social growth, despite the Gulf war, September 11 and the “new economy” crash in 2001 and the present Financial Global Crisis. This evidence is surely true for the G8 countries and perhaps for the OECD ones, but is it also true for the remaining 5/6ths of humanity? What about the effects and consequences of this mega change (Ferri, 2004), on this percentage of the population of the world? As Primo Levi said, it is strictly inherent the structure of the world, and represents the line up of the “doomed” but certainly not that of the

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“saved”, even if it is obviously impossible to give a complete answer to the pressing questions posed here. The issue of the *Digital Divide* is a worldwide theme and unfortunately not well known about in Italy (Zocchi, 2003; Tarallo, 2003).

Through the analysis of Arjun Appadurai’s ideas we can evoke the “divergent globalization” concept (Appadurai, 1996), and at the same time Manuel Castells warns us about: “The problem of the internal differentiation of what was once the “third world”, in the newly industrialized countries (the Pacific Rim area), relatively self-sustaining (China, India) and decomposing societies (Africa, Sub-Saharan, fourth world) have a lot to do with the different degrees of integration or adaptation of these societies for the processes of the information economy” (Castells, 1999, p. 44).

At the same time the phenomenon of mass migration from countries in “rapid decomposition” towards rich countries is correlated to the development of the information economy, just as the topics of the intercultural integration, internal security of developed countries and even of international terrorism is. For example, the January 9, 2002 issue of the Italian newspaper “Corriere della Sera” published an insightful article written by the ex US President, Bill Clinton. The article began: “This new century poses an important question: is the era of interdependence (or we could say of digital globalization) for mankind good or evil? The answer depends on several factors: on the fact that we rich nations today diffuse the advantages and reduce the tribulations of the world; on the fact that the poor nations make the necessary changes for progress to take place; on the fact that we all are able to develop a high enough level of conscience to understand what our reciprocal obligations and responsibilities are”. Clinton’s reasoning centers the question of the relationship among the international crisis, globalization, security and “access” as the benefits of the digital revolution, which the attack on the Twin Towers September 11 dramatically showed us.

A few lines later, Clinton writes: “The terrorist attacks on September 11 were a manifestation of globalization and interdependence as much as the explosion of the economic growth was. We cannot insist on having all the advantages without also seeing the other side of the story. It is very important therefore, to consider the war against terror in the broadest context of the question of how to manage our worldwide interdependence”.

The question which we should ask ourselves therefore is the following: how is it possible to use the new technologies to decrease and not increase the divide between rich and poor countries? How is it possible therefore, to give to the 5/6ths of humanity access to the huge quantity of information, communication and opportunities for emancipation, which global content providing has circulated inside the “second Minneapolis flow economy”. And these global questions are challenging also for the second topic we will try to point out in this essay: how we can manage the intergenerational divide.

In the “fortress of the west”, in fact, the end of the mass media era and the dawn of the digital media era, create great opportunities for economic, cultural and civil growth which are available to the social organization and the political choices; but what happens outside our cities which are more and more networked and informationalized? And what happens “inside the western fortress” to the people with socio-economic disadvantages or to the elderly who we will define “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001)?

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION AS A GLOBALIZATION FACTOR

Let us try to analyze the question from a global point of view. Information Communication Technology constitutes the *condition sine qua non* and the backbone of globalization (1). That the development of *Information Communication*

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